

Inside Comcast's Kids
Zone walled garden **p14**

Social media personalities
pooled for new toy line **p19**

Cartoon Forum—Promising pitches
headed to Toulouse this year **p26**



kidscreen®

engaging the global children's entertainment industry

JULY/AUGUST 2015



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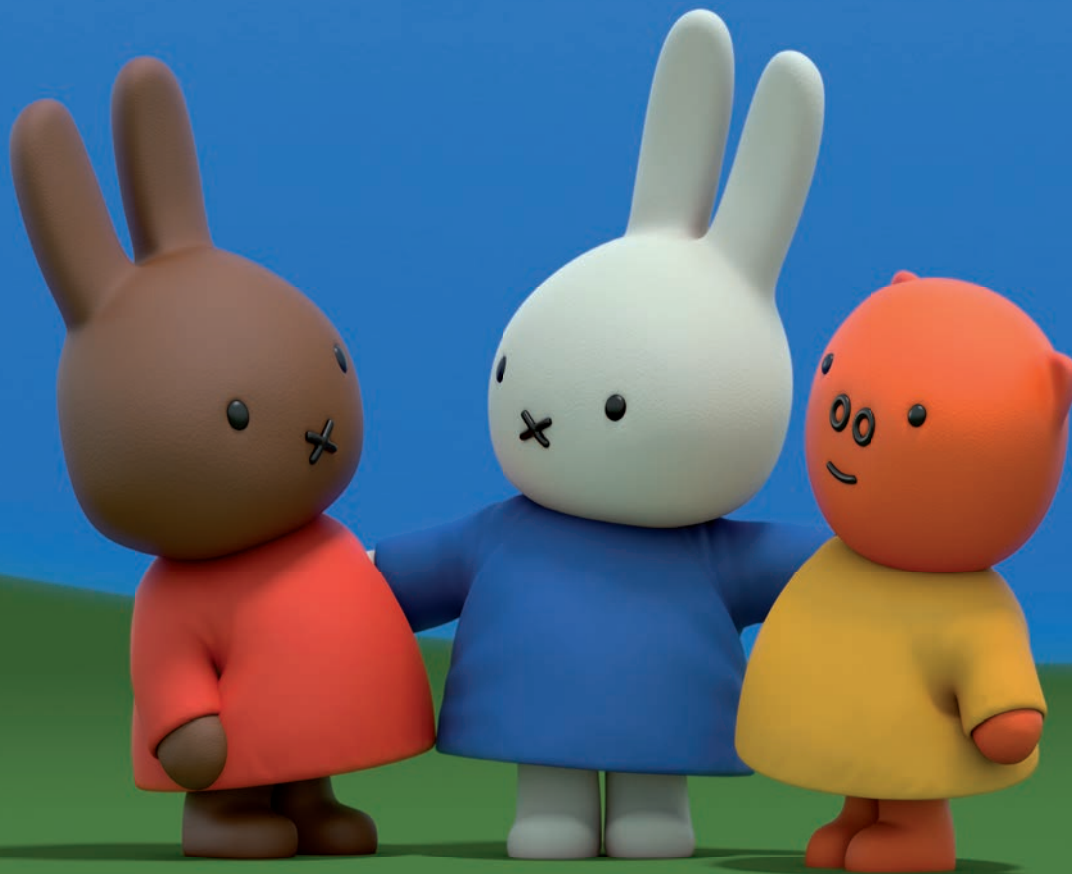


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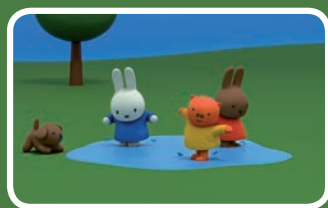
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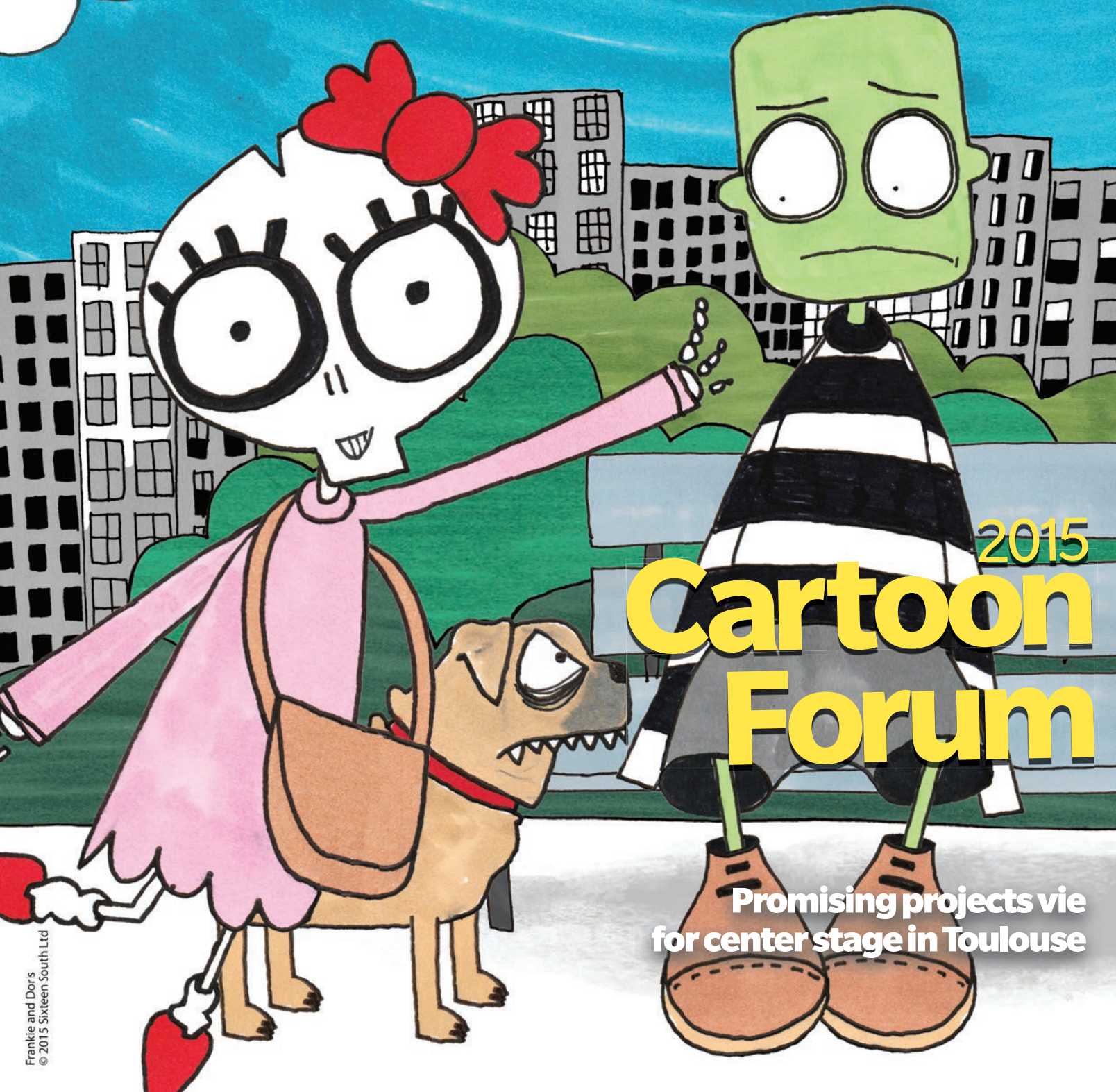


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2015 Cartoon Forum

Promising projects vie
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As we head into our seventh year of celebrating excellence in children's television, we are launching a new set of Kidscreen Awards categories to also pay tribute to the market's best digital media content, products and platforms for kids. What are you waiting for? Put your best work in the running now!

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2016

Details on Categories, Fees, Eligibility,
Judging and Entering are available at

awards.kidscreen.com

Can the holodeck be far behind?

Here's a \$64-million word for you. Electroencephalography. The term refers to a typically non-invasive scientific procedure that uses electrodes attached to one's head to record electrical activity of the brain along the scalp, measuring voltage fluctuations resulting from ionic current within the neurons of the brain. A mouthful to be sure, but it's something in which Disney is apparently very interested.



As we were going to press, the House of Mouse announced the next 10 tech startups set to take part in its second-annual Accelerator mentorship program. A number of companies from last year's crop are already well on their way to being employed by various parts of the media empire. App ChoreMonster, for example, launched a Disney/Pixar Inside Out takeover that unlocks characters from the film. Even more nota-

bly, robotics company Sphero, which produced the hit tech toy of the same name, is set to manufacture the official toy version of the cute new BB-8 droid from upcoming film *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*.

Clearly the 11 startups from Accelerator's first round were chosen for a reason, and many had seemingly actionable entertainment/consumer products applications that Disney could access right away. What's interesting about the second group is that it includes several companies focused on neuroscience and artificial intelligence applications that are, er, mindbending. Electroencephalography? Well, that's currently being practiced by Accelerator participant EMOTIV (emotive.com), a bioinformatics company that uses the procedure to track mental performance, monitor emotions and control virtual and physical objects with thoughts. FEMInc. (fem-inc.com), meanwhile, purports to have developed an interactive personalized video platform based on neuroscience and psychology that maps the hows and whys of the way content resonates with viewers. And while I have an inkling of how a content creator and distributor like Disney could use this technology, I can't say for certain how it would manifest. What's crystal clear, however, is that the industry is at the cusp of a revolution in how content is made and the form it takes.

Linear narrative and storytelling will always have a place—human beings are hardwired to crave them. But technology is moving in on these traditional structures. Virtual reality specialist Oculus is getting into making original programming, including animated content that literally puts the viewer in the picture. Now, imagine programming that uses all that neuroscience feedback to respond to a viewer's emotions and make changes on the fly, just like the holodeck depicted in *Star Trek*. Am I dreaming? Beam me up, Scotty.

Cheers,
Lana

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Cover Our cover features an ad for new CGI adventure series *Zorro the Chronicles* from France's Cyber Group Studios, while our inside editorial cover sports an image of Sixteen South's Cartoon Forum hopeful, 2D-animated *Frankie and Doris*.

Mirette Investigates

2D HD - 52 x 11'



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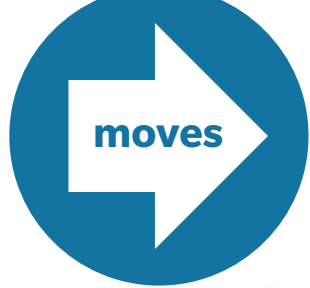
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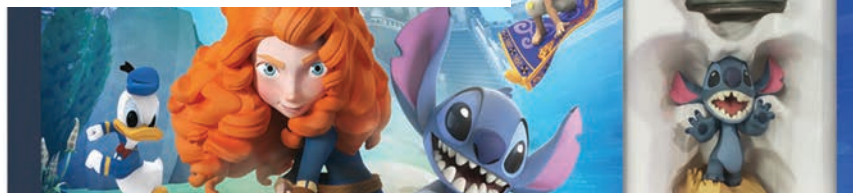
Fall
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www.falltoypreview.org



The List

Five things on our radar this month



1 Disney gets teched out

With a tweak to its business alignment and 10 new startups under its wing, the smooth-running Disney machine is not only keeping up with the times, it's also preparing for the toy industry's technology-laden future. In response to changing consumer preferences, the House of Mouse in late June combined its consumer products and interactive divisions—two areas within the global company that had increasingly been working towards similar goals. And in mid-July, Disney revealed the 10 finalists of its second-annual Accelerator mentorship program, which connects startups with Disney execs, investors and other entrepreneurs. This year, the crop is focused on mind-controlling technology, 3D printing and robotics, with one startup even creating a personalized video platform based on neuroscience that maps the emotional dimensions of how and why content resonates. All of last year's finalists have found success, many in partnership with Disney. If there ever was such a thing as a sure bet, Disney and technology just might be it.



2 Famjams climb YouTube charts

There's an interesting trend emerging in the UK—the popularity of family vlog-type YouTube channels is on the rise with kids 13 and under. A significant shift from first-person gamer channels, UK digital firm SuperAwesome's research credits their daily content centered on everyday family activities for the vlogs' growing viewership. So, with YouTube gamers landing licensing deals, will Family YouTubers follow in their footsteps? Stay tuned.



3 TRU done with outsourcing

After nearly a decade spent in the hands of third-party provider eBay Enterprise, Toys 'R' Us's American e-commerce operations are heading in-house. The retailer plans to grow its US\$1.2-billion online business, and the move also marks a major self-investment as TRU competes with Amazon, Target and Walmart for online eyeballs and sales. With the future resting in the hands of the virtual toy shelf, TRU's sites will be sporting new shopping experiences come next summer.




4 Han goes solo

Just before Star Wars won Comic-Con with a cool behind-the-scenes reel for *The Force Awakens* and a dazzling free concert, Lucasfilm announced that the second Star Wars Anthology prequel movie will focus on a young Han Solo. *The LEGO Movie*'s directors Phil Lord and Chris Miller will be at the helm. Given the team's action and comedy smarts, it seems Disney is game to take the Marvel approach to a galaxy far, far away.



5 Facebook's video push

While YouTube claims it's not concerned about new players infringing on its video turf, competitors are moving fast to give Google a run for its money. Facebook, for one, just hit the four-billion mark in monthly video views, and recently acquired three animated shorts, including Oscar-nominated *Amazonia*, for an exclusive run on the social site. As FB looks to leverage its new rev-share ad program, expect to see it make more video moves.

 To keep up with the news as it happens, check out Kidscreen.com daily.



Wolfe's writing has taken him from classrooms across the US to fanfest MineCon

HotStuff

Mining Minecraft

The future's an open book for teen author **Sean Fay Wolfe** and his HarperCollins fan-fiction trilogy **The Elementia Chronicles**

Who Rhode Island native, Eagle Scout and accomplished martial artist Sean Fay Wolfe was just 16 when he wrote his first book, *Quest For Justice*, part one of a fan-fiction adventure trilogy set in the world of Wolfe's favorite game, *Minecraft*.

The story follows new players Stan, Kat and Charlie on a perilous journey to bring down the villainous king of Elementia, a *Minecraft* server where resources are in short supply and more experienced players exploit the weaknesses of newbies.

After self-publishing the book on Amazon.com in January 2014 with a kuttke editing, PR and back-end help from his parents, Wolfe's life as a young writer hit the fast track. Word about the unofficial *Minecraft* trilogy spread quickly among fans and middle-grade readers whose teachers were soon inviting Wolfe to speak at their schools.

In April, HarperCollins Children's Books acquired the English-language rights to The Elementia Chronicles and is now set to publish *Quest for Justice* on July 28 in the US. With the

second title, *The New Order*, earmarked for release on October 27, and the third, *Herobrine's Message*, for January 26, 2016, Wolfe has his work cut out for him as he transitions to college life. But he wouldn't have it any other way.

He spoke with *Kidscreen* about the ins and outs of being a teen author, and his ambitious plans for the future.

How did you come up with the idea for the trilogy?

I've been playing *Minecraft* since late 2011, when I was 14 years old. Not long after I started playing on multiplayer servers, I got an idea for a story that would take place on a fictional server called Elementia. As a kid, I loved action-adventure books like *Harry Potter* and *The Hunger Games*, as well as the animated TV series *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, so I wanted to create an adventure like that, but in the *Minecraft* setting. I hadn't done any creative writing since elementary school, but I decided to try writing my story. *Quest for Justice* was originally planned to be a stand-alone title, but as I wrote, I realized I could do more with the story, and that a trilogy would be the best format.

Have you been surprised by people's reactions to the books?

I'm amazed by just how positive the reception for *Quest for Justice* has been. I expected a lot of kids to like it (after all, it is about *Minecraft*), but the reaction of older people has been the surprising part. Many teachers tell me it's incredible how invested the kids are in my presentation. I use that attention to talk to them about how reading and writing can make their interests come to life, like I did with my story. The reaction of parents who read the book to their young children has also been awesome. Many have told me that they're just as interested in the story as their kids.

Has anyone from *Minecraft* creator Mojang ever talked to you about your writing?

No. But I was fortunate enough to get invited to sit on a

➞ MINING MINECRAFT CONTINUED ON PAGE 12



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Gaming's bright future

Virtual reality, toys-to-life and influencers leave mark at E3 2015

With global revenues for video game companies forecast to hit US\$91.5 billion this year, according to research firm Newzoo, inventive marketing and promo strategies have never been more important to the expanding sector.

It's a big reason why the US-based Entertainment Software Association (ESA), which organizes the world's premier trade event for the gaming industry, let fans into E3 for the first time ever this year. In all, more than 5,000 gamers streamed into the halls of the Los Angeles Convention Center.

By leveraging the power of influencers and live-streaming, E3 broke records for social media engagement across all channels. It also surpassed 50,000 attendees for the first time in nearly a decade.

The event earned more than 7.5 million likes on related Instagram posts in June, clocked 6.3 million posts on Twitter, had more than a million E3-related videos posted to YouTube, and generated more than 500,000 concurrent views of its press conferences via E3's official streaming partner, Twitch.

Subsequently, this year's show had a fan-friendly atmosphere like never before. Console makers Microsoft, Sony and Nintendo, third-party publishers including EA and Ubisoft, and especially the indie developer community, benefitted from the buzz.

And while E3 remains focused on adult-oriented fare for hardcore gamers, the boost in fan engagement this year meant kids and family games received more exposure than usual.

New toys-to-life offerings such as the upcoming Disney Infinity 3.0 platform featuring Star Wars, Nintendo's hot seller Amiibo, the long-anticipated Lego Dimensions creative play product from TT Games, Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment and The Lego Group, and Activision's latest Skylanders game all grabbed a lot of attention.

Interestingly, Nintendo announced a tie-in with Activision to bring two of its classic characters, Donkey Kong and Bowser, into *Skylanders SuperChargers* for its September release, but exclusively for the Wii U version of the game using new Amiibo figures.

"It's good to see Nintendo take those characters and do something with them outside of just their hardware platforms," noted Martin Rae, president of the California-based Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences.

While Nintendo offered no new details on its upcoming mobile gaming strategy with DeNA or its NX console hardware, the company scored big with its new *Super Mario Maker* platform construction game, which received more than 20 critics' awards. Another fall Wii U release, the adorable *Yoshi's Woolly World*, was also well-received

and is expected to boost sales for Nintendo's oft-maligned eighth-gen console.

Microsoft, for its part, earned praise for the new customizable Xbox One controller and backward-compatibility announcement for Xbox 360 games. But the wow factor was really unleashed during a *Minecraft* demo on Microsoft's HoloLens augmented-reality platform.



Nintendo's *Super Mario Maker* won the Game Critics Award for best family/social game at the 2015 edition of E3

"The VR and AR demos we're seeing now suggest some unbelievably groundbreaking things will be coming out from both an entertainment and an educational perspective," says Rae.

The open-world, customizable play trend was also not lost on Sony, which presented a new PS4 project called *Dreams* that lets gamers paint, animate and share their own dream worlds.

Also of note is a new consumer version of the Oculus Rift from Facebook-owned VR pioneer Oculus, along with Activision's *Guitar Hero Live* reboot and multiple games from EA including *Star Wars: Battlefront* and *Unravel* for console. Additionally, mobile game *Minions Paradise* turned heads, while free-to-play *FIFA* from EA Sports was lauded for its surprisingly great job in bringing a realistic, console-like soccer experience to the touchscreen environment. —Jeremy Dickson

panel at this year's MineCon—Mojang's annual Minecraft conference and fan gathering—where I discussed Minecraft education.

What's the best thing about being a young writer?

There are two main draws to being a young writer. First, because I'm so young, I have a chance to get a head start at building a career. Second, because I'm going to be in college for the next few years, I won't have to worry about all the stresses of leading an adult life, like getting a house and buying food and such.



Aside from writing, you're also into original game development. What's next for you?

I'm currently planning a sequel series to The Elementia Chronicles, which I will write if enough people want me to. I also have another idea for a children's series about twins who fight monsters that can travel between their dreams and the real world. Beyond writing, I would like to expand Diamond Axe Studios (my current production house) to

encompass more than just my published books and games. I would like to use the excess funds I have right now to assemble a team of creative people (many of whom I will surely meet in college) to create a multi-faceted media company. —Jeremy Dickson

On the circuit

Notes for the industry travel diary

September 15 – 18

**Cartoon Forum
Toulouse, France**

www.cartoon-media.eu



More than 850 attendees are expected to land in Toulouse, France for four days of pitching and co-pro talk. The animated TV fest draws attendees from 33 countries, along with 250 broadcasters and investors. Buyers and potential partners from across the globe in past years have included HIT Entertainment, and Zodiak Kids. More than 80 projects will be on tap this year.

October 3 – 4

**MIP Junior
Cannes, France**

www.mipjunior.com



MIPJunior unites more than 1,300 participants and 550 buyers from around the world. Held the weekend before MIPCOM, the event draws producers, buyers and sellers for two days of screenings, networking and meetings. This year, the festival returns to the Hotel Martinez—where cocktails and views of the sea are only an arm's reach away.

October 13 – 15

**Brand Licensing Europe
London, England**

www.brandlicensing.eu



One of the most definitive events for the European licensing industry returns for its 17th year in October, where retailers, licensees and sales promotion professionals will rub shoulders with more than 300 brand owners. Those on the hunt for the hottest licensing brands, characters, images and artwork always have plenty to choose from at BLE.

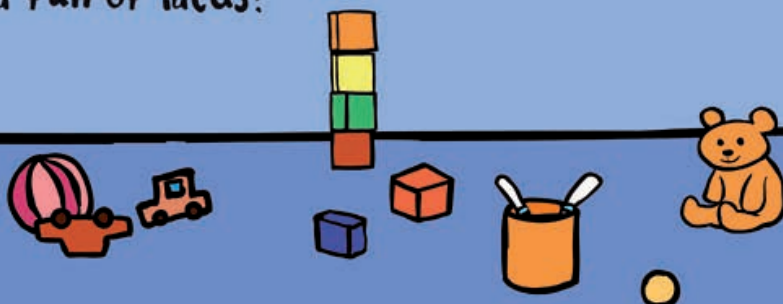
➔ A full listing of Industry Events is available at kidscreen.com/events



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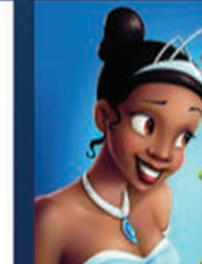
Networks



Categories

Kids is Comcast's third-largest VOD category, and the cable giant expects three billion hours of content to be consumed via VOD this year

**SUPER
HEROES**



Behind the walled garden

How Comcast's new Kids Zone platform is making the US cable giant even more bullish on kids content

BY JEREMY DICKSON

As kids and parents are increasingly consuming online video content across multiple platforms including Netflix, Amazon and YouTube, traditional cbsat carriers are exploring new services that help close the linear/digital divide.

For Comcast, the largest cable provider in the US, its latest consumer-facing technology is Kids Zone—an intuitive, walled-off section on its X1 pay-TV, set-top-box platform. The new service is specifically designed for kids 12 and under to access free, age-appropriate TV shows and movies.

Unveiled in May, its protective features include optional parental controls that can filter programming by specific age ranges, disable the channel up/down button on the remote, and lock out the ability to purchase or rent programming.

The platform integrates age-based ratings and reviews from nonprofit org Common Sense Media for all of

its programming, and the content is divided into four age categories (two to four, five to seven, eight to nine and 10 to 12).

Kids can easily locate recently watched shows, browse by their favorite kidsnets like Disney, Sprout and Nickelodeon, and sort by a number of themed categories such as “superheroes,” “outer space fun,” “talking pets” and “princesses.”

But aside from its claim to be the first walled-garden experience for kids provided by a pay-TV platform, a major point of differentiation for Kids Zone, says Comcast programming VP Andy Hunter, is that it seamlessly aggregates content from all platforms. Live TV, Xfinity On Demand's free and paid VOD library, which includes more than 8,500 kids movies and TV shows and any saved programming on Comcast's DVR, are all represented on Kids Zone.

Tapping its robust VOD offering has been a major focus for the cable operator, especially when it comes to kids. “The scale is huge, and kids is our third-largest category, so it's a big priority,” says Hunter.

A magical partnership

With the arrival of *Wishenpoof!* and renewal of *Creative Galaxy*, Angela Santomero is on a roll with Amazon

Out of the Blue co-founder Angela Santomero has a proven track record in children's entertainment with hits like *Blue's Clues* and *Super Why!* But her current streak with Amazon has the kids content producer reaching new creative heights.

Her 2D-animated pilot *Creative Galaxy* was one of the first kids concepts from Amazon Studios' initial round of pilots in 2013 to be greenlit for full series production. After launching successfully last summer on Prime Instant Video, the educational preschool program has been re-upped for a second season.

But until the new production ramps up, Santomero is currently putting the finishing touches on *Wishenpoof!*, her second pilot-to-series project for Amazon that is set to premiere later this year.

The CG-animated preschool series follows an imaginative little girl named Bianca, who in trying to harness her ability to use "wish magic," ultimately uses her own wits and guidance from her silly-yet-sage sidekick Bob the Bear to help her friends out of jams.

With consultant expertise from gender-equality advocate, entrepreneur, mom and author Melissa Wardy (*Redefining Girly*) and Families and

Work Institute co-founder and author Ellen Galinsky (*Mind in the Making: The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs*), *Wishenpoof!* teaches the essentials of problem-solving, empathy and making good choices.

"We spent a lot of time writing, researching and working with Ellen to develop a strong, funny, wish-filled show that centers around executive functioning skills," says Santomero. "We also took a lot of time to develop the look and feel of the show. The characters and environments were brought to life with a vision of soft doll textures in a mixed-media world—and our animation partner DHX in Halifax really delivered something unique."

Amazon Studios head of kids programming Tara Sorensen says despite the fact that the pilot was CG-animated and stretched from 11 to 22 minutes, it was still produced within Amazon's usual six- to seven-month timeframe.

"It's certainly easier to accommodate an 11-minute 2D pilot, but we still manage to work with the animation studios to produce within our timeline," Sorensen says.

According to Santomero, time is always a challenge, but without the instant online feedback of Amazon customers, *Wishenpoof!* may have turned out much differently.

"In hearing that viewers wanted Bianca's parents to be more involved, and that kids wanted more story, we decided to go with 22-minute eps to expand the storytelling and music opportunities," she says.

Amazon had never produced a 22-minute preschool pilot before, notes Sorensen. But the studio was open to changing the format because it didn't want to shy away from more aggressive production projects. "When you look at both [formats], there is an aspect of creative play that we're able to showcase, and we wouldn't have been able to do it an 11-minute story," she says. —Jeremy Dickson



Wishenpoof! from Out of the Blue and DHX Media is set to land on Amazon later this year

"Last year we did approximately 2.8 billion hours of VOD consumption overall, and we expect to do more than three billion hours in 2015," he says. "Roughly 70% of our customers use VOD on a monthly basis, and consumption is even higher on X1, where 85% of our customers use it monthly—we see up to a 35% lift in consumption on that platform compared to our native environment."

Hunter adds that all types of kids content perform well on the platform, especially shows from the bigger networks.

In addition, many programs that have been on air, taken off, and put back on again are also doing well. "It's interesting to see that series like *Hannah Montana* and *Full House* are still relevant to a new generation of kids," he notes.


And according to Comcast, several kids shows and terms have popped up in its top-50 most common commands for its new voice remote. Cartoon Network, Disney, Nickelodeon, *SpongeBob*, *Teen Titans Go* and *Mickey Mouse* are among the most heavily searched terms.

As far as data measurement goes, Hunter says the process has only just begun, but consumption patterns will be examined for every part of its Kids Zone guide and experience. "Then we'll surface content in a way that is representative of those viewing habits," he says.

For the short term, Comcast will continue to work with its content partners to provide a wider range of programming to drive usage. Its long-term plans, meanwhile, will focus on how technology can improve the X1 and Kids Zone experiences.

There are no plans at the moment to invest in original programming. "We have all the hits from the networks, so we feel pretty comfortable with our offering," says Hunter.

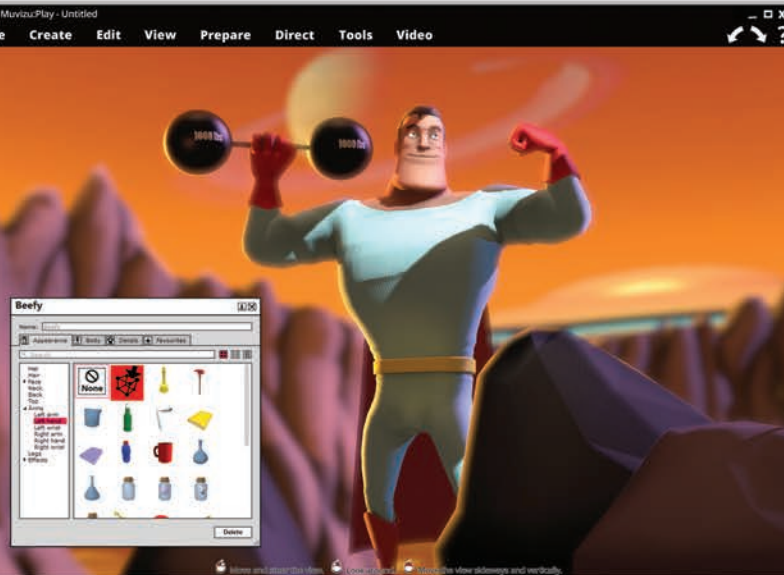
One area he would like to see improve is Comcast's ability to make its content more mobile.

"Of the 70% and 85% of our customers using the VOD platform on a monthly basis, roughly 35% of them use our TV Everywhere services, so we want to bring that up to parity," he says. 

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Just Launched Oddbods



What started as a series of doodles from One Animation's creative director Richard Thomas, has been transformed into new CG-animated slapstick series *Oddbods*. The dialog-free cartoon bowed in 2013 as 300 one-minute clips on Next Media's *nxTomo* app before landing on the likes of Disney XD (US) and Télétoon+ (France). With more imminent deals, it's looking like big things are in store for the little egg-shaped characters.

From the heart Produced in-house, *Oddbods* is a sketch-based series of comedic shorts targeting four- to nine-year-olds and adults that follows the misadventures of a group of seven colorful and distinct characters (Fuse, Newt, Pogo, Bubbles, Jeff, Zee and Slick).

In the development process at Singapore-based One Animation, Thomas says he was inspired by the character traits of the seven dwarves in *Snow White* and the underlying heart in *Tom and Jerry*. "I remember watching both shows obsessively as a kid. What struck me about *Snow White* were the personalities of the dwarves and how each one was easily identifiable through a very particular character flaw," Thomas says.

"With *Tom and Jerry* it was all about interaction. One couldn't really exist without the other, and despite their ongoing feud they were, at heart, the best of friends."

According to Thomas, the Oddbod characters are often compared to the Minions, but he says *Oddbods* is a different beast. "It's really flattering

because who doesn't love the Minions? But where *Minions* focuses more on the volume of characters and the ensuing chaos, we only have seven," he says. "We find that from our characters, people always find one to root for more than the others."

To make the series more commercially viable, the studio determined that there would be no dialog, which would make the series appeal to a broader audience. And the tone of the one-minute series ranges from sweet and innocent to slightly edgy. "At a glance, the characters look very preschool, like a plush toy," says Thomas. "But their personalities are pretty complex, and at times they convey very adult emotions."

Format tweaks After the one-minute episodes launched on mobile, Thomas and the team at One decided to produce an *Oddbods* series with longer five-minute episodes that could be sold more easily to linear broadcasters, tracked for ratings, and offer a better balance of kid- and adult-friendly content.

Canal+ kids channel Télétoun+ first aired the shorts in December 2014 on a trial basis before debuting the five-minute series in February.

To drive more eyeballs to the show, the French channel produced two online games and heavily promoted the one-minute shorts across Canalsat, YouTube and the Télétoun+ website.

A month later, the *Oddbods* one-minute shorts headed to Disney XD in the US. It was a significant deal for the company, says One Animation CEO Sashim Parmanand.

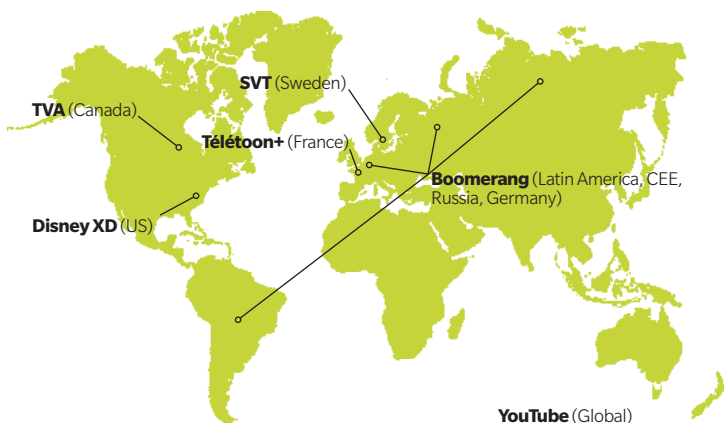
"As a Singapore-based indie, getting the US deal was highly instrumental to our growth and the team's confidence in their own ability," she says. "There are just a handful of Southeast Asian producers who have found a US broadcaster—so for us, it was very important."

Up next At MIPTV in April, One presented the pilot for its brand-new 60 x seven-minute *Oddbods* series and is currently negotiating deals for broadcast, digital game extensions and toys.

"Coming out of Licensing Show in June, we have marked the toys for Latin America and the US, and we are currently in negotiations with other high-level toycos," says Parmanand.

And despite the fact that series has done well on YouTube since launching in January, Parmanand says there are no SVOD deals currently in the works. "Discoverability is an important factor and that's more where the linear broadcasters come into play," —Jeremy Dickson

On-air



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Working with their individual reps, Jazwares licensed the likenesses of 40+ online celebs for its first Tube Heroes line



Betting on digital

Jazwares launches Tube Heroes toy line and licensing program based on collection of hot online personalities

BY PATRICK CALLAN

At a time when the global toy industry is rapidly rebooting classic properties for today's digital natives, there's at least one company looking outside the shrinking pool of 1980s and 1990s hits to create new products.

Toyo Jazwares is instead combing the burgeoning realm of digital-born properties. Scoring the global toy license to Minecraft in 2013, the Sunrise, Florida-based company now knows what a big digitally driven hit looks like. And for its next move in the space, Jazwares has honed in on the growing ranks of YouTube and social media stars to launch a new line of plush, figures and role-play items.

Tube Heroes launched earlier this summer with a Toys 'R' Us exclusive in the US and will head to global mass retail in August. With Jazwares making toys and overseeing an extended licensing program, key partners already on board for the international launch are Bio-world (apparel) and Accessory Innovations (accessories).

Tube Heroes unites a range of today's top online entertainers and personalities under a single umbrella. Combined, its star-studded lineup boasts more than 83 million subscribers and 19 billion views (and counting) across a variety of social platforms. There are more than 40 digital celebs represented in the initial range, including the likes of popular YouTube gamers Sky, CaptainSparklez and TDM, whose channels boast more than 11 million, 8.6 million and 6.8 million subscribers, respectively.

Bill Graham, VP of business development at Jazwares, says in recent years both consumers and retailers have come to see these online personalities as stars of the new frontier in entertainment. And it's time they got their due. "These are not people who are isolated from the retail and entertainment world anymore," he contends. "They're very well-known within some of the most important demographics in our retail space."

Graham adds that retailer response and engagement has been extraordinary. "Fans are excited. The talent



Montreal and Toronto renew their historic hockey rivalry in new Playmobil licensed toys

Playmobil scores first North American license with the NHL

After 40 years as one of the world's leading toycos, iconic Playmobil is making a play in the North American licensing arena, thanks to a deal with the National Hockey League.

The first Playmobil NHL line will feature the sport's original six teams (Boston, New York, Montreal, Detroit, Chicago, Toronto), a play ice rink, referees and a Zamboni ice-resurfacing machine. Complete with interactive players and goalies that can shoot and stop the puck, the line will hit all tiers of North American retail in October, timed with the start of the 2015-2016 NHL season.

While plans are in the works to add the rest of the league's 30 teams, the initial goal is to get the first batch of products into the market to gauge consumer reaction, according to Playmobil's Canadian director of sales and marketing, Richard Brookes.

As to why Playmobil chose the NHL for its first North American in-bound license, especially since hockey is not the most popular professional sport in the region, Brookes says the game is a perfect match for Playmobil's brand.

"Hockey really fits well with our format of toys," Brookes says, referring to a similar interactive soccer line that is popular in Europe. Hockey also aligns with the company's motto of giving children creative license to use their imaginations during play. "Hockey, particularly the NHL, gives kids a playing field. And from there, they can develop their own characters, thoughts and imagination to be whichever player or number they want to be."

Now that it's finally entered the North American licensing market, Playmobil is also scouting for other potential partners, both in the sports and character-based entertainment worlds. "We have interest in lots of properties, and we're going to choose what's correct for us and correct for the property, too," says Brookes. "That's all I can say."

To be sure, any licensing partnership Playmobil considers will have to be on side with the company's core goal of fostering children's imagination through play. "With some licenses, you're basically leading kids into a play pattern," he says. "We've been very, very cautious about it for the past 40 years, but times change and companies adjust as they go forward. We're still about imagination, and that's what our future is about as well." — Patrick Callan

themselves are very excited," he says. "It's kind of a cool, crowning moment for a person when they receive a toy based on their persona for the first time."

The Tube Heroes line reflects the unique features of each chosen star. And because they are in fact heroes, each character comes with its own mythical backstory. For example, the ExplodingTNT core figure comes with a shield and nunchaku to set off his accompanying dynamite. Described as a man of few words, his powers revolve around all things that go boom. TNT (2.2 million subscribers) is also one of the most powerful heroes of all time because he can't die—he simply regenerates instantaneously, any time he explodes.

Assembling the initial Tube Heroes lineup was an organic process carried out over the past few years, Graham says, as Jazwares followed the rise of digital stars' visibility in the entertainment industry. Obviously the number of views and followers of each individual weighed on the selection process, but Jazwares placed more value on the quality of views, viewership trends and qualitative fan appeal. To secure the licensing agreements with the

40-plus members of the first line, Jazwares worked directly with the talent or their representatives.

While the toys officially target kids ages eight and up, with such a varied cast of characters creating content for both young and mature audiences, Jazwares is already seeing a broad spectrum of consumers. "The interesting thing about the brand is really how wide an audience it could ultimately appeal to," Graham says.

Going forward with the brand and its large-scale CP program, Jazwares is preparing to announce several new partnerships ahead of the global rollout, namely in categories like bedding, sleepwear, publishing and trading cards. As the brand grows and builds momentum, Jazwares will look to bring more YouTube and online stars into the fold and expand into more entertainment genres, product categories, and into both the girls and boys aisles at retail.

"But at the same time we want to be measured, making sure we're adding on in the right ways and keeping a very tight and focused program," says Graham. 📌



Reinventing the wheel

Activision adds vehicle innovation to help keep Skylanders soaring at retail

Approaching the half-decade marker with Skylanders, Activision is once again looking to redefine the toys-to-life category it so famously created back in 2011. Now with 75% market share—or roughly US\$3 billion of the US\$4 billion in category sales—the Santa, Monica, California-based video game publisher is gearing up to launch the franchise's fifth iteration in September for kids ages six and up.

Bringing vehicles to life is the defining feature of *Skylanders SuperChargers* (US\$74.99), which will introduce fans to 20 new interchangeable character and car-like figures. The new title is also compatible with all 300+ characters from previous editions. Two new fully functional RC cars with working headlights from NKOK will accompany the game's release, and new Kaos costumes will be available for Halloween from Rubies. But as Skylanders has grown and evolved over the years, so too has its overall licensing strategy, says Ashley Maida, Activision Publishing head of global licensing and partnerships.

Licenses in categories like apparel, for example, will always be able to take advantage of the new title releases, Maida says, but the recent shift to a 365-day licensing program allows the bulk of licensees to create timeless products, as opposed to title-specific ones. "This alleviates production and retail planogram challenges that are associated with changing branding each year," she explains.

In general, the Skylanders licensing program aims to partner with industry leaders and category experts, Maida says. The US program, in particular, now covers all major categories (i.e. publishing, apparel, back-to-school, game accessories, costumes, construction sets, bedding, party goods). Premier partners include Penguin Publishing, Crayola, Franco Manufacturing, American Greetings, Party City, McDonald's, Frito-Lay, General Mills, Thermos, Power A and KIDdesigns. And

accordingly, Activision handles core interactive game and action figure product lines.

So far, the driving force behind Activision's continued success with Skylanders—both digitally and physically—stems from the company's commitment to fans and retailers that it will consistently innovate its product. Case in point: this year's vehicles-to-life title. Maida says Activision has an ongoing 360-degree relationship with retailers, who believe in the brand's innovation and leverage it to drive daily, weekly and monthly traffic into their stores.

As is often the case, licensed Skylanders merch is placed in the electronics aisle right next to the game. There are also typically many different Skylanders touch points and secondary locations throughout a single retail outlet. "We also work with retailers to create true destinations in-store with breakthrough signage and interactive displays meant both to educate and entertain consumers," Maida adds.

With the likes of Disney's Infinity, Nintendo's Amiibo, Lego's Dimensions and Spin Master's Sick Bricks nipping at its heels in the toys-to-life category, Activision isn't just sitting back on its lead. Instead, it's constantly looking for ways to stay one step ahead of the competition, and expanding its licensing footprint is a key piece of that equation.

At the moment, Activision is looking to add licenses in health & beauty, confections, ancillary toys, novelty and outdoor categories in the US. In addition, new and expanding licensing partners for 2015 include Party City, Fathead, NKOK and Punch Bowl.

"The highly anticipated next installment of the franchise is infusing a great deal of energy and excitement around the merchandising program, and the retail programs that are being created are some of the biggest to date," Maida says. —Patrick Callan



Uptown bunk

BY WYNNE TYREE

Glamping

Costs at some summer camps can run as high as US\$12,000 per session per child. And for that amount of money, both children and their parents expect ultimate happiness. Many offer expansive facilities with the look and feel of high-end resorts. Camp Laurel in Readville, Maine boasts two soccer fields, two baseball fields, 15 tennis courts, a roller-hockey arena, and five basketball courts—all fully lit for use after dark—as well as a modern fitness center, cardio studio, and gymnastics center. Others boast state-of-the-art computer centers, equestrian facilities, heated indoor and outdoor pools, gourmet kitchens, movie theaters and drama studios.

Staying connected to peer-ents

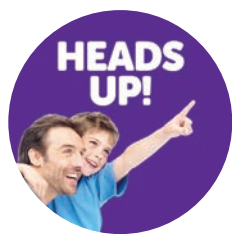
Along with meeting kids' new needs, camps have also had to adjust to the expectations of helicopter (or Velcro) parents. Camps are giving up on rules against cell phone use, not only because kids want to hold onto their devices, but also because *some parents* have trouble sleeping through the night without being able to check in.

Many summer camps embrace parental interest and have launched Facebook streams with hundreds of daily photos and videos, as well as offering newsletters with summaries of camp events and kids' accomplishments. Even the traditional "Parent's Day," where parents stop by to visit their children, has been replaced by "Parents Weekend"—or week—where parents share accommodations with their children and take part in all the same camp activities.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, camps also help parents to let go and allow their kids to be kids. As one mom said, while showing a picture of her daughter knee-deep in mud, "I love that she's getting to play in the mud and make a mess, but I'll be damned if I let her do that at home!" Summer camps alleviate some of the fear parents feel when their children declare they want to try riskier activities like water skiing, trapeze lessons and zip lining.

The big business of summer fun

The prevalence of brands and retailers in families' lives does not end when kids leave for camp. In fact, camps are leveraging this attachment by partnering with top brands to give kids a deeper experience with the characters and properties they love, from American Ninja Warrior to American Girl. Brands also welcome the



Summer camps still aim to help children reach developmental milestones, but modern programs have elevated the once-rustic retreat to a highly profitable business

With camps continuing to play a key role in the summer plans of US families, they have had to evolve with the times. In fact, summer camps are specializing. Gone are the days of generic programming—today camps hone in on the most popular themes and areas of interest among kids and families. For day camps, this can mean having a pirate day or silly science week. For sleep-away camps, this translates to highly specialized experiences based in four key categories:

Career Some camps help kids explore potential future professions, testing them out for a few weeks to learn more about what such work would be like. For example, robotics camps let kids channel their inner engineer, and fashion camps teach kids to create runway-ready outfits.

Wellness With the heightened focus on physical fitness and the obesity crisis among US kids, many camps are attracting interest with a focus on instilling life-long healthy habits in their campers.

Role-play Whether kids dream of being a ninja warrior, a rock star, or colonial settler, there are camp options around the country to let them live out their fantasies.

Religion From Christian camps in Ohio to Jewish camps in Tel Aviv, religious camps are a mainstay, but the category is being updated to include new spiritual philosophies. Camp Quest, with locations in more than a dozen states, for example, bills itself as a secular humanist camp.

What's so great about... being messy?!

BY ARIN TUERK PH.D.

Any parent who has spent an evening scraping spaghetti off the kitchen wall knows, growing up is a messy job! From mealtime to playtime, kids are exploring the world with their eyes, hands, mouths and noses, taking in a wealth of information with every squish, sniff and splatter.

Sensory play is critical for cognitive development, and stimulating the senses strengthens neurologic pathways important for all types of learning. From infancy, messy, tactile play helps children develop gross motor skills and hand-eye coordination. Later in development, hands-on, trial-and-error play helps children build complex concepts like gravity and states of matter.

In a very real way, children are like little scientists, generating hypotheses about how things in their environment work, and then collecting data by acting on the world around them. Generating the hypothesis that the substance in a cup of milk is the same kind of stuff that creates a splashy puddle, and then validating that theory by knocking the cup over, is as rewarding to a toddler as it may be irksome to a parent. Messy play is an important part of the scientific process for young children, and encouraging them to discover and differentiate materials lays the groundwork for classification and sorting—key components of preschool STEM learning.

Recent studies suggest that kids who dive in and literally get their hands dirty learn words faster than those who don't. While toddlers are like sponges when it comes to learning new labels for objects, learning words for more abstract concepts is a pretty tricky feat. Imagine the task of teaching a toddler the word "clay." The first time you introduce clay, it's in the shape of a ball. So how is the toddler to know that "clay" refers not to the spherical shape, but to the substance it's made of? How can the toddler set up a concept of "clay" that applies both to the ball in front of him and to the flattened pancake you create by smashing it down? Physically exploring the world of goopy, gritty, stretchy and sloppy helps children think flexibly about properties of objects and how things can be categorized based on more than one feature. This kind of flexible thinking allows children to consider similarities and differences along multiple dimensions and supports the development of analogous reasoning.

Research suggests that, for adults, disorderly environments like a messy office or a cluttered desk can encourage creative thinking and inspire fresh insights. Messy sensory play can similarly inspire creativity in young children. Toys like shape sorters and LEGO allow kids to bring structure to a messy world while learning problem-solving and building logical-thinking skills. And as play time shifts increasingly towards screen time, hybrid products like Tiggly and Skylanders continue to help kids explore and learn through hands-on-experiences, blending the timeless benefits of tactile play with the emerging possibilities of digital play.

So as it turns out...getting messy is really neat!



Arin Tuerk is an analyst at **Insight Kids**, a passionate team of business strategists and developmental experts who spend their waking hours pondering and communicating timeless truths and timely trends. Through innovative qualitative and quantitative market research and consulting, they bring the voice of the child to the creative process, helping their clients create products and experiences that meet kids where they are. To connect with Insight Kids, please email info@InsightStrategyGroup.com, or check out www.InsightKids.com.

invitation to get involved. LEGO, for example, offers a suggested curriculum and set of activities for use at LEGO-based summer camps/summer enrichment programs on its website.

New businesses have also emerged to harness the spending power of families with campers. Full-service packing companies make sending kids off to camp easier than ever. At rates around US\$250 an hour, these companies help to reassure parents that their children will be sent off to camp with all the comforts of home. Retailers like Lester's are selling packaged "bunk gifts"—like birthday party swag bags, only filled with camping treats—for kids to distribute to the 10 or so other campers sharing their cabin. And camp advisors

and consultants are charging more than US\$1,000 to help families select the right camp, much like independent college advisors help families choose and apply to the perfect college.

While the summer camp experience has clearly evolved and opened up to brand involvement, the ultimate goal remains the same—making sure kids play, explore, make new friends and push their limits. **K**



Wynne Tyree is the president of Smarty Pants, a youth and family research and consulting firm.

Heads Up! is derived from the company's daily in-person and digital immersion into kids' and families' lives, as well as proprietary quantitative research. For more information contact Meredith Franck at 914-939-1897 or visit asksmartypants.com.



A new narrative

Pulling from hundreds of graphic and storytelling digital assets, each Lost My Name book is tailored to the individual buyer

UK-based publishing startup Lost My Name has had no trouble finding its way into readers' hearts with a content-rich take on personalized publishing

BY DANIELA FISHER

In just two years, London-based startup Lost My Name has made great strides towards becoming a leader in the personalized publishing space. Along with selling more than 600,000 copies of its first print-on-demand picture book globally, the company recently attracted the eye of Google Ventures, and nabbed US\$9 million in financing in June.

The picture book *The Little Boy/Girl Who Lost His/Her Name* follows the adventure of a boy or girl who wakes up one morning to find his or her name has disappeared, and he/she then goes on a quest to find the missing moniker.

Tapping into a growing trend for custom content in children's books, videos and toys, each title is created on the Lost My Name website, where users enter a child's name and get an instant preview of their book. Upon placing an order, the book then gets printed and shipped.

But unlike other similar products in the market that use the same story and pictures and then just fill in the blanks with each child's name, Lost My Name has programmed more than 300 narrative variants in its database. Its proprietary personalization software then accesses the database to pull individual story and graphic elements to create a unique adventure each time an order is placed—no two books are quite alike, regardless if the same name gets used.

The inspiration to start Lost My Name came when co-founder Asi Sharabi's daughter received her first personalized book. For Sharabi, the warm and fuzzy feeling of seeing his daughter's name in print lasted about 1.5 seconds. "I realized how underwhelmed I was by the quality of the product," he remembers. "It had very little substance beyond the commercial gimmick of just taking a book and adding a name to it."

But the potential for more was there, notes Sharabi, who teamed with co-founders Tal Oron, writer David Cadji-Newby and illustrator Pedro Serapicos to launch

Lost My Name in April 2013 as a side project. To develop both story and software, the partners drew upon their experiences working at marketing agencies and designing digital products at internet startups.

"These personalized books have been in the market for 40 years, but they were never taken seriously as a creative canvas," Sharabi contends. "No one yet was looking at this idea of personalized media as a creative canvas and also as a technology playground."

The books really started gaining traction in the UK in 2014, when Lost My Name took the highest equity deal ever made in the 13-year history of British reality series *Dragons' Den*, which invites budding entrepreneurs to pitch a panel of seasoned investors. From there, global sales soon picked up.

"In 2014, we ended up selling 325,000 units in 135 countries," Sharabi recalls. "We were the top-selling picture book last year in the UK, Australia and Canada. We're purely a web product and only sell directly—we don't distribute to any retail store or other distribution channel—and yet we sold more books than the top-selling picture books in three countries in our second year."

Along with blending technology with the power of storytelling, the book's success can also be attributed to the business model. Being a full-stack publisher means Lost My Name controls all aspects of product development, marketing, sales, operations and customer support in-house. "Because it's print-on-demand, we are a zero-inventory company," explains Sharabi. "These assets live digitally, which means we can update them as often as we want."

So what about that US\$9 million? Moving forward, Lost My Name plans to launch its second publishing project this fall and is exploring other avenues to build personalized entertainment, including animation and physical products, using its proprietary software.

"The core element of any product or experience that we will ever launch for children will be this sense of magic we've created," Sharabi promises. "It's getting kids to engage in a deeper way with the narrative." 



Modelled on Russian nesting dolls, Avakai toys communicate with each other via Bluetooth and emit sound and colored light

New Kid in Town

Making the connection

How Berlin's Vai Kai is blending connectivity with classic toy design

Vai Kai, a Berlin-based startup dedicated to building connected play products for children.

While the company officially launched in January, its origin stretches back to when co-founders Matas Petrikas (a software developer and product manager) and industrial designer/toy inventor Justyna Zubrycka set out to make a product that integrated the quality of traditional toys with the versatility of mobile devices.

"When we started prototyping our first toy, we knew that we wanted to build it around classical hiding games, like hide-and-seek and treasure hunt," explains Petrikas. "I saw that my daughter was becoming more immersed in screen time and felt that it was time to inspire her and her friends to play actively together, using their imaginations."

The company recently launched a Kickstarter campaign for a wooden doll named Avakai. In creating the figure, Petrikas and Zubrycka took inspiration from traditional Japanese Kokeshi and Russian nesting dolls, whose timeless shapes have inspired play for generations of kids.

Smart play Built from locally sourced wood, Avakai dolls use Bluetooth technology to communicate with each other and respond with sound, colored light and haptic feedback (i.e. vibrations). The technology allows the toys to sense proximity and movement, which can be ideal for games like hide-and-seek. Avakai can also be connected through a mobile app for long-distance interaction.

Petrikas is aiming to create a toy that better resonates with modern connected kids, using the best traditions from the past. "Children grow up today surrounded by technology, but it's not all designed for them—it was built for adults or for business needs," he notes. "We believe that the magic of technology should be accessible for kids on their own terms, allowing them to play and communicate with all their senses—not just on screen."

What's next The company intends to continue working on its products through the second half of the year, as well as on establishing relationships with potential supporters and distributors. Vai Kai has also planned a series of on-site play dates for families to test out its prototypes. Starting in August, cities on the play date sked include London, New York, Stockholm and Copenhagen. —Daniela Fisher

Shaping up Deep in the Polish countryside there is a woodworking factory where master craftsmen carefully transform blocks into 21st-century toys. Combining doll and device, the toys are the first product line from

The Digits

Numbers that speak volumes about kids and technology

The number of UK kids with access to a tablet at home in 2014 was up to

71%
VS
51%
in 2013
(Ofcom)

Video games and apps

top the list of products US kids ask their parents to purchase over toys and treats
(YouGuv)

NETFLIX

is on track to reach

69.9 million subscribers

by the end of this year, up 28% from 2014
(Digital TV Research)

In a new study, 31% of parents reported their eight-year-old daughters spend

10 to 15 hours a week online,

compared to fewer than five hours a week for boys of the same age
(Intel Security)

CARTOON FORUM FOCUS

In anticipation of Europe's annual animation pitching and co-pro fest, we're taking a peek at some of the prime projects headed to Toulouse in September

BY JEREMY DICKSON



preschool

Gigantosaurus Based on a book by bestselling children's author/illustrator Jonny Duddle (*Pirates Next Door*), *Gigantosaurus* is set in the Cretaceous period 65 million years ago, when long-necked brachiosauruses and enormous triceratops ruled the Earth. The series centers around four young dinosaurs—fearful Bill, fascinated Rocky, humorous Tiny and science buff Mazu—who learn a great deal about themselves, and elusive dino Giganto, on their many adventures together.

Producer: Cyber Group Studios (France)

Style: CGI animation

Format: 52 x 11 minutes

Budget: US\$5.2 million

Status: A bible and two scripts have been written, a trailer is being readied for Cartoon Forum, and initial discussions with European broadcasters are underway.

Burrows Part soap opera, part sitcom, this series created by Reuben Loane (*Igam Ogam*) and Rhys Reed-Johnson, and designed by Cardiff illustrator Amy Brown, follows the adventures of the staff at Burrows supermarket. It's an underground shop run entirely by animals for animals. Each episode will be stand-alone, but the series includes a number of recurring gags and themes. Story scenarios include the appearance of a can with no label, what happens when the staff gets locked out after a fire drill, or when bumbling manager Walter Badger loses the store keys.

Co-producers: Telegael (Ireland), Calon (UK)

Style: Stop-motion animation

Format: 26 x 10 minutes

Budget: US\$3.1 million

Status: Two scripts, a full bible and a trailer will be ready for Cartoon Forum. The producers are also now shopping the series to international broadcasters.

preschool



Frankie and Doris

This series follows the adventures of two 11-year-old misfits, a lonely green boy and an adopted boney girl. They meet one day at their school bus stop and form an unbreakable bond. Neither have ever had a friend before, let alone a best friend, but together, the pair is determined to make their dreams come true. The concept comes from the minds of lifestyle journalist Ann Riley and acclaimed UK designer Will Broome. It's being developed for television by creative director Colin Williams and development producer Michelle Forde at Sixteen South.

Producer: Sixteen South (UK)

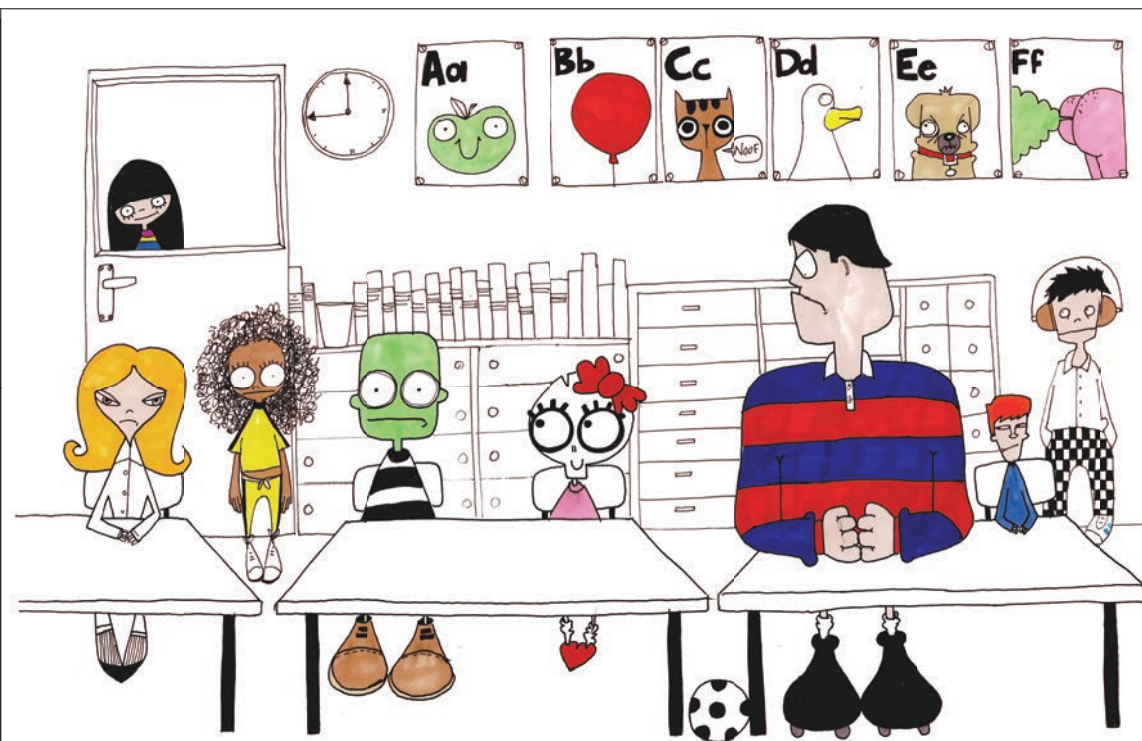
Style: 2D animation

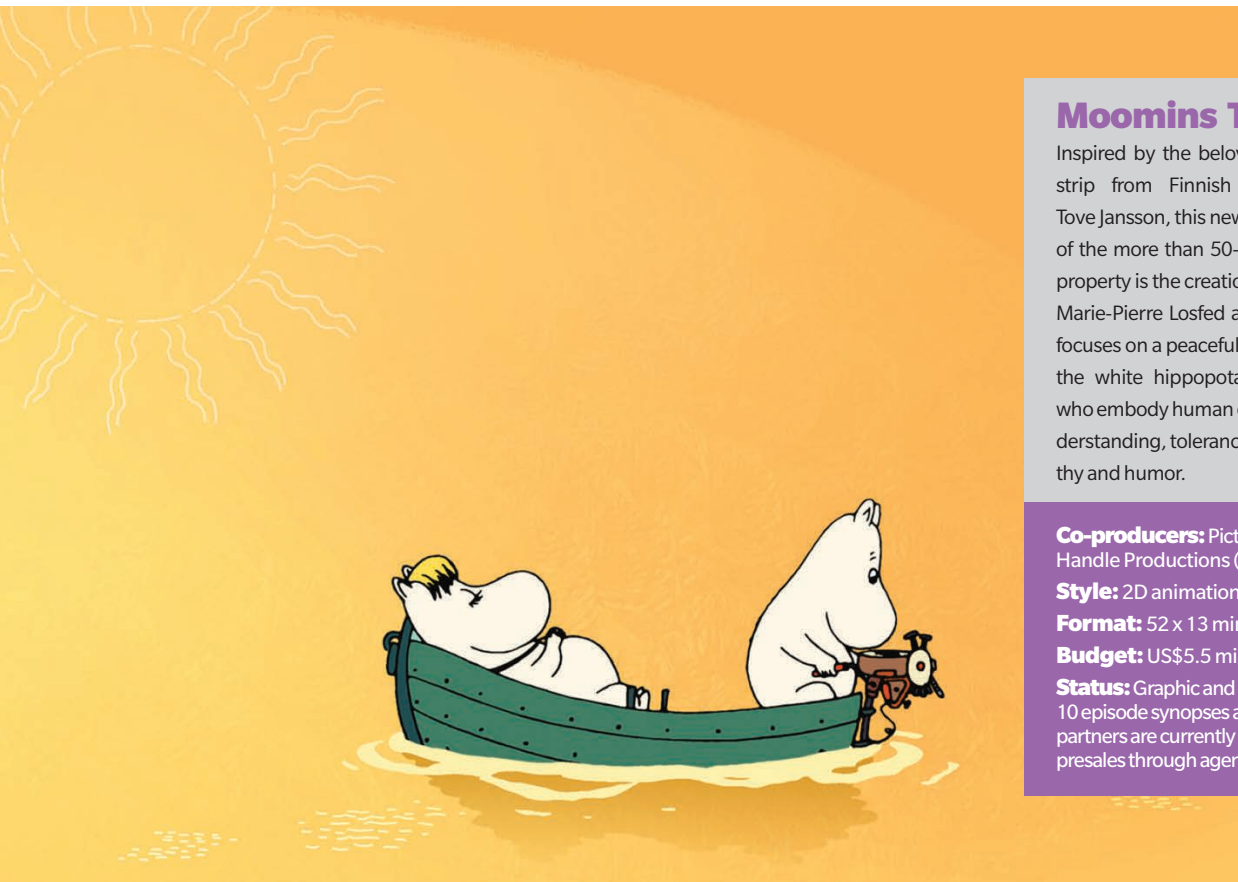
Format: 52 x 11 minutes

Budget: US\$6.3 million

Status: A bible and trailer were first pitched to broadcasters at Kidscreen Summit in February. Canal+ is sponsoring the series at Cartoon Forum, and two scripts will be ready for the pitchfest.

9 to 11





Moomins The Series

Inspired by the beloved Moomin comic strip from Finnish novelist/illustrator Tove Jansson, this new television iteration of the more than 50-year-old publishing property is the creation of Hanna Hemila, Marie-Pierre Losfed and Xavier Picard. It focuses on a peaceful family of Moomins, the white hippopotamus-like creatures who embody human qualities such as understanding, tolerance, sensitivity, empathy and humor.

Co-producers: Pictak Cie (France), Handle Productions (Finland)

Style: 2D animation

Format: 52 x 13 minutes

Budget: US\$5.5 million

Status: Graphic and text bibles, and 10 episode synopses are complete. The partners are currently looking for broadcast presales through agent Indie Sales.

6 to 8

Tweedy & Fluff

Tapping into the special bond people have with their first pets, this series created by children's writer and producer Corrinne Averiss (*Pip!*, *Share a Story*) follows the adventures of two woolly yarn characters. The pair meets on the workshop floor of a tweed mill and become best of friends. Featuring characters designed for stop-motion animation by Chris Randall, *Tweedy & Fluff* shows how exciting, comical, challenging and rewarding having a pet can be. Averiss drew inspiration from her friend Emma Cornes, a tweed bag maker, in creating the series.

Co-producers: Second Home Studios (UK), Stitchy Feet (UK)

Style: Stop-motion animation

Format: 40 x five minutes

Budget: US\$2.5 million

Status: With a presale to UK pubcaster CBeebies in hand, a trailer, bible and designs will be available at Cartoon Forum.

preschool



Dorg Van Dango Created by Fabian Erlinghauser, animation supervisor on Cartoon Saloon features *The Secret of Kells* and *Song of the Sea*, this comedy examines life through the thick-lensed glasses of a 13-year-old boy named Dorg Van Dango. After discovering a motley crew of supernatural beings who escaped while being transported to a secret holding facility (Area 51), Dorg disguises them as teenagers and befriends them. Under his wing, the creatures quickly learn there is more to life than haunting and scaring unsuspecting humans.

Producer: Cartoon Saloon (Ireland)
Style: 2D animation
Format: 52 x 11 minutes
Budget: US\$4.9 million
Status: In early development with a number of treatments and a couple of scripts prepared.

9 to 11



Spoky This non-dialog comedy-adventure series from creators Philippe Clerc, Nicolas Chretien and Julien Charles, follows the madcap adventures of the world's first sushi delivery dog. Wily and brave, Jack Russell terrier Spoky's job would be a whole lot easier if he didn't have a gang of sushi-starved alley cat outlaws constantly on his tail.

Producer: Futurikon (France)
Style: 2D/3D animation
Format: 78 x eight minutes
Budget: US\$7.2 million
Status: A two-minute pilot, bible and animatic of episode one are almost complete. One script, along with an endless-runner video game prototype, is also ready. The prodco will be looking for co-producers at Forum.

6 to 8



It's stupid that this prejudice even exists in the first place. Every nuance counts, the eye-dart, the raised eyebrow, the posture. We are UX fanatics. We felt that it was time to create toys again that kids can grow up with.

- Minecraft fan-fiction author **Sean Fay Wolfe** on gender imbalance in the gaming industry
- One Animation's **Richard Thomas** explains the importance of conveying emotion in dialog-free series
- Personalized publisher Lost My Name's **Asi Sharabi** shares his team's passion for customer service
- Vai Kai's co-founder **Matas Petrikas** explains the inspiration for the startup's Avakai interactive wooden doll line

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